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CHAPTER 7

Bonding, Religious Allegiance and
Covenanting

JANE E. A. DAWSON

In her seminal book *Lords and Men*, Jenny Wormald achieved the important double that great historians accomplish. She both dealt superbly with a particular body of evidence and also revealed an entire world and guided the reader into it and around it. By opening up this new territory of lords, men and their bonds Jenny has given those who follow in her footsteps a chance to explore, to find exciting paths to travel and to discover new ways of examining familiar landmarks. Although the second achievement has probably overshadowed the first one, her classification and explanation of the actual bonds has received the accolade of being silently absorbed into the standard accounts and becoming part of the ‘givens’ for understanding Scotland during the late medieval and early modern period. These days the categories of bonds of maintenance, manrent, friendship and political and religious bonds can be found in historical discussions from school essay to specialist article. This exploration will start with Jenny’s list of ‘religious bonds’ and chart how conventional bonds grew into a new type of bonding expressing a profound sense of religious allegiance and identity and flowing into the covenanting tradition.¹

I

As Jenny demonstrated, a bond of maintenance reflected the perspective of the ‘lord’, usually a noble overlord or feudal superior. It detailed how the lord viewed his relationship with his ‘man’ and in particular what he would be doing to ‘maintain’ his ‘servitor’.² The *Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue* (*DOST*) defines ‘maintenance’ as:

¹ Jenny Wormald, *Lords and Men in Scotland: Bonds of Manrent, 1442–1603* (Edinburgh, 1985), appendix C: ‘Political and Religious Bonds’. The religious bonds are calendared at pp. 410–12.

² Wormald, *Lords and Men*, chs 2 and 4.

backing, support, protection, granted by, or due from, one person to another, his dependants, possessions etc. ... As by a lord to his man, one ally to another ... Also *band*, *letter(is) of maintenance*, a formal contract of such backing or protection.³

Bonds of maintenance were typically made up of four discrete sections. First, the preamble explained that it was the 'bounden duty' of the lord to help his man. Second came the promise to apply power and strength and 'very lyves' in support of the particular people who were named or identified. Third, the actual maintenance clause contained the promise to 'mantene, nuryss and defende'. Finally, as befitted a legal document, came the subscription by the parties to the bond, along with witnesses, date and place.⁴

On 3 December 1557 a bond of maintenance was drawn up offering to defend a small group of men from potential threats to them, including a summons to court or 'day of law'. So far, so routine. What was more unusual was that the bond was issued conjointly in the name of five different titled lords. Rather than their own dependants, protection was extended to an unusual group of recipients: those who preached and those who heard sermons. What was startlingly different from a usual bond was the overtly religious language and purpose. Though wrapped in ideologically charged terminology, the four elements constituting an ordinary bond of maintenance were plainly present:

[Preamble] 'We persaving how Sathan in his membris the Antechrystis of oure tyme, crewellie dois raige seiking to downebing and to destroye the Ewangell of Christ and his Congregatioune: awght, according to oure bounden dewtye, to stryve in oure Masteres Cawss, even vnto deth: Being certane of the victorie in him: The quhilk our dewtie being weill consyderit: [Promise] We do promiss before the Maiestie of God and his Congregatioune that we (be his grace) sall with all diligence continewallie applie oure haill power, substance, and oure very lyves, to mantene, sett forwarde, and establishe the maist blessed Worde of God, and his Congregatioune. And sall lawboure at oure possibilitie, to haif faithfull Ministeres purelie and trewlie to minister Christes Evangell and Sacramentes to his Peopill: [Maintenance Clause] We sall mentene thame, nwryss thame, and defende thame, the haill Congregatioune of Christ, and everye member therof, at our haill poweris and waring of our lyves againis Sathan and all wicked power that dois intend tyrannye or troubill againis the forsaid Congregatioune: Onto the quhilk holie Worde and Congregatioune we do joyne ws: and also dois forsaik and renunce the Congregatioune of Sathan, with all the superstitioun, abhominatioun, and idolatrie therof. And mareattour sall declare oure selwes manifestlie innemyes tharto. [Subscription] Be this oure faithfull promiss before God, testefyt to his Congregatioune, be oure Subscripitiounes at thir presentes. At Edinburgh, the (blank) day of

3 *DOST*, s.v. 'maintenance' (italics in original).

4 This is adapted from the discussion in Wormald, *Lords and Men*, ch. 4.

December, the zere of God ane thowsande fyve hundreth fiftie sevin zeres:
God callit to Wytnes.

Archibald Argyll
Glencairn
Mortoun
A Lord of Lorn
Jhone Erskyne⁵

A misconception about this bond's signatories has been prevalent since the sixteenth century. As was appropriate for a powerful bond of maintenance, all five men who signed were earls and lords. The first to sign was Archibald, fourth earl of Argyll, one of the most powerful peers in the realm and the group's senior figure in authority and age. He was followed by Alexander Cunningham, fifth earl of Glencairn, a long-standing and fervent supporter of the Protestant cause. James Douglas, fourth earl of Morton, was the third man to sign, and was followed by Archibald Campbell, Lord Lorne, son and heir to the earl of Argyll. Finally, John Erskine signed; this was the sixth Lord Erskine who was later earl of Mar and Regent of Scotland. It was assumed until recently that the final signature belonged to John Erskine of Dun, the laird who later became a minister in the Reformed Kirk and Superintendent of Angus and the Mearns. In the original manuscript of his *History* John Knox assumed that Erskine of Dun signed. Since Knox had not been in Scotland in 1557 and had no first-hand experience of the bond, the confusion probably arose because the bond seems to have been circulated and Erskine of Dun probably signed it at this later stage. Knox recorded in his *History* that Erskine of Dun and the lairds of the Mearns had made a similar declaration in 1556 binding themselves together to support the Protestant cause. No text for this bond has survived, and it is not clear whether a written document was created.⁶

Following Knox, the editor of *The Works of John Knox*, David Laing, declared,

There is no reason to doubt (having Knox's authority for the fact) that the last name was that of John Erskine of Dun, and not John Lord Erskine. Knox it will be observed, to these five names adds, *Et cetera*, and expressly states, that this Bond 'was subscribed by the foir-writin and many others'.⁷

This view has been repeated by later commentators. However, Laing also printed a facsimile of the signatures to the bond from the original document that had been exhibited by the Reverend James Young at the 1860 Tercentenary of the Reformation.⁸ When compared with his other signatures, the Erskine

⁵ Knox, *Works*, vi, 674–6.

⁶ Wormald, *Lords and Men*, 412; Knox, *Works*, i, 250–1; Frank D. Bardgett, *Scotland Reformed: The Reformation in Angus and the Mearns* (Edinburgh, 1989), 52.

⁷ Knox, *Works*, i, 273; vi, 674–6 (Laing's italics).

⁸ The original of the First Band is at NLS, Charter 902.

signature on the First Band matched those of Lord Erskine.⁹ The recognition that the final signature was penned by another peer, rather than a laird or minister-in-waiting, underscores and greatly strengthens its significance as a noble bond of maintenance. Each member of that first group was drawn from the highest social and political rank in the realm and ensured that the bond represented a step change in support for the Protestant movement.

Most Scots viewing the bond in 1557 would assume that this was what nobles did: lords protected their men. They would also have understood that some senior members of the Scottish nobility were willing to give public support for Protestant preachers and preaching, and protect those who attended the 'heretical' sermons and other services. As with all bonds of maintenance, the implication was that, when necessary, protection would be armed; 'our haill poweris and waring [i.e. spending] of our lyves' were promised for the fight. In addition, the 'enemies' were identified as Satan and the 'members of Antichrist'. Although they were not named, this targeted those who might be conducting a campaign against heresy and 'dois intend tyrannye or troubill againis the forsaid Congregatioune'. By association, this included the entire ecclesiastical hierarchy in Scotland and anyone prepared to support them. The traditional bond formula allowed the peers to declare publicly that they were 'manifestlie innemyes' to that entire 'congregatioune of Sathan'.

II

The document signalled a shift, socially and tactically, in the profile of the scattered groups of Protestants in Scotland. The five peers were promising to maintain, nourish and defend the 'haill Congregatioune of Christ', the adherents of what remained a heretical movement. With that protection in place, from being an underground network the Protestants were able to emerge into the public gaze. They could now operate openly as a pressure group with a specific programme for religious reform, to 'establishe the maist blessed Worde of God, and his Congregatioune'. The use of the language of lordship declared that noble power and even military force might be employed to implement this religious programme. There was a new willingness to make an open and direct challenge to the Catholic hierarchy and defend an alternative form of worship.

Though the format of the document and the basic provisions followed the standard maintenance contract, something new had emerged from this adaptation of traditional formulas. One obvious omission was the lack of an equivalent bond of manrent, the normal mirror image of a bond of maintenance.¹⁰ In a departure from conventional practice, no reciprocal action on their part

⁹ NLS, MS 73, fos 20–1, 29, 32–7.

¹⁰ Wormald, *Lords and Men*, ch. 4.

was required from the ministers and 'congregation' to be protected. This was not simply an unwillingness to enter into contracts concerning matters of worship or with preachers.¹¹ In addition to describing the central purpose of the bond in religious terminology such as holy word, congregation of Christ, Antichrist, superstition and idolatry, the First Band contained a specific declaration of religious allegiance and alliance. Two routine components within a bond were altered: the presence of witnesses and the oath on a sacred object such as the Gospels. Since Protestants denied that sanctity could adhere to physical objects, they abandoned the practice of placing their hands on sacred objects whilst taking an oath. Instead the five nobles gave their 'faithfull promiss' openly to avow their Protestantism, 'onto the quhilk holie Worde and Congregatione we do joyne ws'. Though no one signed the bond on their behalf, the Congregation would be able to bear legal witness or 'testefy' to the bond.

The real witnesses at the promise-taking were God and Christ. In one sense the five nobles gave to Christ their manrent and allegiance, vowing 'to stryve in oure Masteres Cawss, even vnto deth'. With its overt declaration of allegiance to God, these innovations created the first religious bond in Scotland, and its significance was encapsulated by Jenny:

For the first time this commonplace of Scottish society was turned to religious use: subsumed into the Calvinist idea of the religious covenant, it produced a short and succinct clarion call for the advancement of the new faith, which set a pattern out of which there would emerge, 80 years later, the National Covenant.¹²

The 1557 document later achieved iconic status within Covenanter thinking and historiography. However, in the middle of the sixteenth century Scots employed the word 'cunnand', rather than 'covenant', when describing such a bond with God, best exemplified in baptism. In 1552 Archbishop Hamilton's Catechism had explained, 'For quhat uthir thing is Baptyme, bot ane faithful cunnand and sickir band of amitie maid be God to man and be man to God?'¹³ The description of the 1557 bond as the 'first covenant' was initially made by James Carmichael at the time of the King's Confession of 1581. David

11 As that champion bond-maker Colin Campbell of Glenorchy demonstrated four years later, there were no qualms about making a contract with Mr William Ramsay, minister at Inchaiden that specified that he should preach and provide Protestant worship: NRS, contract between Campbell and Ramsay, 28 May 1561, GD112/1/114. The 181 bonds of manrent made by the Campbells of Glenorchy, listed under 'Breadalbane' in Wormald, *Lords and Men*, appendix A, pp. 205–49, form the largest group of bonds that have survived. 'Grey Colin' had his bonds entered into a special 'buke of bandis', GD112/24/2.

12 Jenny Wormald, *Court, Kirk and Community: Scotland, 1470–1625* (London, 1981), 111.

13 *The Catechism of John Hamilton, 1552*, ed. T. G. Law (Oxford, 1884), 185; *DOST*, s.v. 'cunnand'.

Calderwood later helped create a genealogy of covenants and this flowed into the full-blown Covenanting tradition that became a significant element within Scottish history and identity.¹⁴ The inevitable emphasis upon the 1557 bond's religious language and its role as founding father of the Covenants has obscured its format as a noble bond of maintenance.

III

The second religious bond was signed at the start of the Wars of the Congregation in May 1559. It built upon the main theme of the defence of ministers and the Protestant cause. Such protection had become necessary after Knox's 11 May sermon and the subsequent iconoclastic riot in Perth, the flashpoint that started the Wars of the Congregation. Support had been mobilised from other parts of the kingdom, including the well-organised and committed Ayrshire network.¹⁵ On 31 May the earl of Glencairn, Lords Boyd and Ochiltree and the master of Loudoun¹⁶ signed a bond on behalf of the Protestant supporters from the West. The goal was more specific than the 1557 First Band; the lords promised 'thair haill poweris to distroy, and away put, all thingis that dois dishonour to his name, so that God may be trewlie and puirelie wirschipped'. Given that the summoning of Protestant ministers to a 'day of law' at Stirling on 10 May had provoked the chain of events, the bond carefully specified that protection was given against the use of legal process, whether on an explicitly religious charge or not.

An additional dimension was introduced of an alliance entered into via a bond of friendship.¹⁷ In the past the format of bonds of friendship between social equals had slipped into political bonds with a specific political objective; it was a small step to use the same format for a religious programme.¹⁸ The 31 May bond employed the familiar terminology of a bond of friendship, 'to keap ane constant amitie, unitie, and fellowshcipe togidder' in order to do 'all thingis required of god in his Scripture, that may be to his glorie'. The classic 'all for one and one for all' clause found in such bonds was included: 'in case that any truble beis intended againis the saidis Congregationis, or ony part, or member thairof, the haill Congregatioun shall concur, assist, and conveane

14 Edward J. Cowan, 'The making of the National Covenant', in John Morrill (ed.), *The Scottish National Covenant in its British Context* (Edinburgh, 1990), 68–89, at p. 70; J. Lumsden, *The Covenants of Scotland* (Paisley, 1914).

15 Margaret H. B. Sanderson, *Ayrshire and the Reformation: People and Change, 1490–1600* (East Linton, 1997) ch. 7.

16 Sir Matthew Campbell of Loudoun, who succeeded his father Sir Hugh in 1561. He signed as Campbell of Teringland or Terrinzean in Kyle.

17 This category of bond is listed in Wormald, *Lords and Men*, appendix B.

18 Wormald, *Lords and Men*, appendix C, where political and religious bonds are listed as a single category.

togidder, to the defence of the samin Congregatioun, or persone trubled'.¹⁹ The Western lords made this bond in Perth with the fifth earl of Argyll and Lord James Stewart, Commendator Prior of St Andrews.²⁰ Though initially supporting the Queen Regent, those two nobles had been persuaded to change sides.²¹ In the 31 May bond, and another signed with some Perthshire lords the following day, Argyll and Lord James made a public commitment to join their co-religionists.²² Their switch of allegiance made the two nobles the effective leaders of the self-styled 'Lords of the Congregation'.

As the name indicated, these 'Lords' expressed their aims in the ways they knew best, within the format of bonds and the language of lordship. At Stirling on 1 August a brief bond was subscribed that focused upon one particular theme of the bond of amity, the need to hold together. Those who signed declared that they would not be separated by:

the craft and slycht of our adversaries, tending all maner of wayis to circumvene us, and be prevy meanis intendis to assailzie everyie ane of us particularie be fair hectis and promisses, thairthrow to separat ane of us frome ane uthir, to oure utter rewyne and destructioun.

The Regent's attempt to negotiate individually on the tried and tested 'divide and rule' formula was to be countered by sharing the content of all communications and making joint decisions about responses to Mary of Guise.²³



During the war, the Lords of the Congregation utilised bonds to draw together a 'party of revolution' to fight the Queen Regent.²⁴ The religious bond was expanded into a general and public bond. Though initially made in Edinburgh, the 13 July 1559 bond survives only in a copy that circulated within St Andrews. It was signed by men conscious of being members of the

¹⁹ Knox, *Works*, i, 344–5; Wormald, *Lords and Men*, 411.

²⁰ Argyll, who had succeeded his father in 1558, had signed the First Band as Lord Lorne. His friend, Lord James, was the illegitimate son of James V, later earl of Moray and Regent of Scotland.

²¹ For a fuller discussion see Jane E. A. Dawson, *The Politics of Religion in the Age of Mary, Queen of Scots: The Earl of Argyll and the Struggle for Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge, 2002), ch. 3.

²² 1 June bond with Lord Ruthven, the earl of Menteith and William Murray of Tullibardine, discussed in Dawson, *Politics of Religion*, 92.

²³ The names of those making the bond have not survived: Knox, *Works*, i, 381–2; Wormald, *Lords and Men*, 411.

²⁴ Gordon Donaldson's phrase in his *All the Queen's Men: Power and Politics in Mary Stewart's Scotland* (London, 1983), ch. 3.

‘Congregatioun’ and, crucially, drawn from a variety of social ranks.²⁵ This general bond took the format one further stage by extending a noble alliance to include everyone who supported the common religious purpose and were willing to fight for the cause. To sign was to promise to ‘sett up the trew religioun of Christe’, and ‘with our haille power and diligence to walk fordward in the waiis of the Lord, laboring to destroy and put downe all idolatrie, abhominatioun, supersitioun and quhatsumever thing dois exalte the self against the majestie of our God’.

Unlike the 31 May document, where representative lords signed on behalf of the Western contingent, the July bond had ordinary St Andrews craftsmen, such as the saddler, John Biccarton, adding their names.²⁶ In St Andrews 331 men signed the bond, though no female Protestants since it had a military element. The language of maintenance had been pushed to the background, with the emphasis shifting to making a commitment to ‘june ourselfis togiddir as memberis of ane body’ and to ‘bind and obliss ourselfis, in the praesence of our God, of his Sone Jesus Christe, calling for the Haly Spirite to strenth us to performe the same’. The Trinitarian formula and the devotional language brought the bond closer to the parallel development of accepting a confession of faith and making a recantation of former beliefs.²⁷ Such general bonds circulating in areas where the Congregation had control became a testimony of religious allegiance. Being bound into ‘one body’ with its strong associations with sacramental unity turned adherence to a general bond into a badge of Protestant identity.

The combination of a religious purpose with a national cause added the final ingredient to the bond or covenant, and one that came to haunt the covenanting tradition. The ‘last bond’ of the Congregation signed by most of the Scottish political nation on 27 April 1560 at Leith reflected the changing agenda of the party of revolution. The religious purpose was now defined more precisely as procuring ‘by all meanis possibill, that the treuth of Goddes word may haif free passage within this Realme, with due administratioun of the sacramentis, and all thingis depending upoun the said word’. The Congregation had added a patriotic appeal to broaden its support base and make the diplomatic and military alliance with rebels more palatable to Queen Elizabeth of England. Alongside the reformation of religion was placed the freeing of the kingdom from French domination as a parallel goal:

- 25 *Register of the Minister, Elders and Deacons of St Andrews, 1559–1600*, 2 vols, ed. D. H. Fleming (SHS, 1889–90), i, pp. vii–viii, 6–7 (text), 8–10 (list of 331 names).
- 26 Biccarton later fell out with the St Andrews Kirk Session and was excommunicated, though ‘he had assistit the congregacion wyth his body armit in defence againis the inimeis impugnors of the trewth’: *Register of St Andrews*, i, 195.
- 27 The recantations of some of the priests in St Andrews were entered in the Kirk Session Register immediately after the 13 July Band: *Register of St Andrews*, i, 10–18.

‘[we] concur and joyne togidder, taking anefald plane pairt for expulsoun of the said strangeris, oppressouris of oure libertie, furth of this Realme’.²⁸

The apparently timeless language taken from the bonds that deliberately concentrated upon general aims of unity and amity, defence and maintenance had given the Lords of the Congregation a remarkably helpful set of formats and phrases from which to construct the general religious bond. The adaptation of the language of lordship also furnished a patina of comforting and familiar tradition to cover their religious and political revolt. By 1560 the ingredients of the religious bond or covenant had been assembled: a religious purpose to uphold preaching the ‘Evangel’ and ‘true’ worship; protection and maintenance for preachers and all members of the ‘congregation’ from their enemies; a single alliance or party held together by the ‘all for one and one for all’ clauses; membership of the alliance open to all willing to support the cause, irrespective of rank; a declaration of religious allegiance and confession of faith with God as witness; a link between national and religious causes.

Although it was a necessary strategy in 1559–60, running two purposes in parallel weakened rather than strengthened a religious bond. An internal tension undermining its coherence and unity was created by having two separate goals. The ‘last’ bond’s cumbersome text was weighed down with extraneous matter such as how internal disputes should be resolved. As with many coalitions, the attempt to attract as wide a constituency as possible, and satisfy its differing needs, diluted the solidarity of a common identity with its binding obligations. The same tension and potential for conflict between two different purposes was present most dramatically in the 1638 National Covenant.

The situation in the closing stages of the Wars of the Congregation also directly affected private bonds. The patriotic language of freeing the kingdom was attached to the religious purpose of establishing true religion in a bond of friendship signed in May 1560. The head of the Hamilton lineage, the duke of Châtelherault, and his heir, the earl of Arran, made the political bond with the earl of Morton as part of a wider deal to settle their dispute over claims to the earldom of Morton. They were faced with a dilemma when it came to the place in a noble bond to insert the normal ‘exception’ clause covering allegiance to the crown.²⁹ Without mentioning the monarch or the Queen Regent’s authority they produced the interesting formula, ‘sa fer as we may be the lawis of this realme and with ane frie and saif conscience’.³⁰ This

28 Wormald, *Lords and Men*, 411; Knox, *Works*, ii, 61–4. The phrase ‘anefald plaine pairt’ was regularly used in bonds: *DOST*, s.v. ‘anefald’.

29 The exception clause, ‘his alleageance to our soverane lord the kingis maiestie allanerlie being excepted’, from the example bond of maintenance by William, lord Herries to Robert Macbrair of Almigill, 16 June 1589: Wormald, *Lords and Men*, 414.

30 Wormald, *Lords and Men*, 405; NRA(S) 2177, papers of the Douglas-Hamilton family, Dukes of Hamilton and Brandon, no. 479 (MS copy of the 31 May 1560 bond between

adjustment within one small clause of the bond highlighted how a major step could be taken of dividing allegiance owed to the kingdom from that given to the monarch.³¹

V

The achievement by the Lords of the Congregation of their twin goals of religious reformation and political independence in the summer of 1560 added the gloss of success to religious bonding. The public adoption of the Confession of Faith in the Scottish Parliament on 17 August can be regarded as the culmination of the religious bonds of the Wars of the Congregation. Emotional declarations accompanied the 'promise' or acceptance of the Confession containing clear echoes of the language of bonding. As the English ambassador recorded:

Dyvers with protestation of their Consciens and Faythe, desyred rather presentlye to end their lyves than ever to thinke contrarie unto that that allowed ther. Maynie also offereit to shede their blude in defence of the same ... concluding all in one that that was the Faythe wherin thei ought to lyve and die.³²

The Scots Confession reinforced the confessional element within religious bonding, but did not replace or supersede it. Bonds retained their ability to sustain a religious identity and kept their potential to elevate that allegiance above the loyalty owed to the crown.

The general bond signed at Ayr in 1562 demonstrated the rebellious element that such bonds continued to possess. As in the First Band, it was the 'preaching of the Evangell', and the ministers who preached who were given protection by the ninety-one signatories drawn from the south-west of Scotland.³³ In traditional phrases from a bond of friendship, it bound all into an alliance ensuring that 'everie ane of us shall assist otheris', and that their maintenance should extend to 'the hoill body of the Protestantis within this Realme', and not only those within their own region. The national reach of

Morton, Châtelherault and Arran). Cf. HMC, *Eleventh Report, Appendix, Part VI* (London, 1887) (Duke of Hamilton), p. 38, no. 77/28.

31 The many aspects of 'kingship' and 'commonweal' are discussed in J. H. Burns, *The True Law of Kingship: Concepts of Monarchy in Early-Modern Scotland* (Oxford, 1996) and Roger A. Mason, *Kingship and the Commonweal: Political Thought in Renaissance and Reformation Scotland* (East Linton, 1998).

32 Thomas Randolph's report to William Cecil, 19 August 1560, cited in Knox, *Works*, vi, 116–17.

33 Seventy-eight names in Knox, *Works*, ii, 348–50; 91 names on copy in Sir William Fraser, *Memorials of the Montgomeries, Earls of Eglinton*, 2 vols (Edinburgh, 1859), ii, 192–3; Wormald, *Lords and Men*, 411, 156; Sanderson, *Ayrshire*, 44, 121, 124.

the maintenance offered in the bond therefore incorporated an entire party identified solely by their religious allegiance. Protection was extended to all Scottish Protestants: 'whosoever shall hurt, molest, or truble ony of our body, shalbe reaputed ennemye to the hoill'. This bond elaborated upon the theme of a solemn oath before God, with the powerful assertion of making the 'promesse in the presence of God, and in the presence of his Sone our Lord Jesus Christ'. In a final flourish, the bond was justified in the contexts of salvation and Kirk membership, 'as we desyre to be accepted and favored of the Lord Jesus, and reaccompted worthy of credyte and honestie in the presence of the godlie'. In this bond, honour and worthiness were to be judged by religious, rather than noble, faithfulness, with the emphasis firmly placed upon Christ as king and lord. These were the kinds of concepts that would characterise the covenants in the following century. Though created in the context of a traditional rivalry between different Ayrshire affinities, the assumptions within this bond potentially challenged the noble concept of honour within Scottish society.³⁴

Instead of employing the usual clause about dispute settlement by a higher authority or legal process, the 1562 bond cited the Kirk's new courts, 'except that the offender wilbe content to submit him self to the judgement of the Kirk, now establisshed amangis us'. While the language retained its familiar ring, the implications were new. It included the new institution of the Reformed Kirk and its congregations and drew into its compass the entire body of Protestants in Scotland. Even more significant was the underscoring of a different concept of kinship, the spiritual kindred of the 'godlie', those joined in a common covenant with God created and sustained by the sacraments of the Reformed Kirk and upheld by the Kirk's discipline and judgement. Scottish Reformed ecclesiology brought the language of leagues and covenants to the fore, and Article 21 of the *Scots Confession of Faith* had emphasised the sacraments 'mak ane visible difference betwixt his people and they that wes without his league'. In particular, sacramental theology and practice helped underline the similarities between being a member of the Kirk and religious bonding. The *Book of Common Order* explained that attending a baptism was designed to ensure every member of the congregation was 'putt in minde of the league and covenant made betwixt God and us that he wilbe our God, and we his people'.³⁵ Knox had summarised the significance of the Lord's Supper in terms redolent of bonding, as 'the declaration of our covenant, that be Chryst Jesus we be nurissit, mentenit, and continewit in the league with God our Father'.³⁶

The 1562 bond had been composed shortly before the disputation held at

34 Cf. Keith M. Brown, 'Honour, honours and nobility in Scotland between the Reformation and the National Covenant', *SHR* 91 (2012), 42–75.

35 Knox, *Works*, iv, 189.

36 Knox, *Works*, iii, 125.

Maybole between John Knox and Quentin Kennedy, abbot of Crossraguel, and Knox had forewarned that 'troubles' might come. The abbot was backed by his powerful Kennedy kin led by the earl of Cassillis, and the Ayr bond was a public declaration of extensive support for Knox, not least from opponents of the Kennedys. Surprisingly, this particular confrontation was not subsumed into these long-standing regional rivalries, and the bond's confessional language emphasised that it was a new-style declaration of Protestant allegiance.

The disputation between Kennedy and Knox did not escalate into armed confrontation, though the contemporary situation in France demonstrated what might have happened. Following the massacre in 1562 of the Protestant congregation at Vassy by the duke of Guise, the Protestant nobles led by the prince of Condé had extended their protection to other congregations and co-religionists within France. Since the defence of Protestants was expanded to include the seizure of Rouen by Protestant forces, the situation rapidly degenerated into full-scale war. As this example demonstrated, one man's defence of religion was another man's rebellion. The bond of 1562 avoided government censure because there was no fighting in Ayrshire. In the following year its existence and terms probably played a part in the queen's indignant reaction when Knox wrote to his Protestant friends in the West and elsewhere.³⁷ His letter speaking of the dangers facing the Kirk was interpreted as a deliberate attempt to mobilise the support promised in that earlier bond. It was possible to construe that letter as an open summons to the queen's lieges, and possibly treasonable, though after investigation Knox was absolved by the Privy Council in December 1563.³⁸

By tracing phrases and concepts from noble bonds of maintenance and friendship that were taken into religious bonds, one direction of flow between the two spheres has been demonstrated. Religious language, ideas and ritual had flowed the opposite way from the beginning of bonding within medieval Scottish society. The church had always been the other arena in which kinship and its many obligations could be deliberately created. Its sacramental system, especially in baptism and marriage, produced new 'affinities' among the key participants, with ties that bound for life. They had a direct effect upon the language and ritual of the bonds, and in one instance had produced a new type, a bond of gossipry, based on the baptismal links of godparenthood.³⁹ The complex interaction between civil and religious practice was more than a two-directional interchange. It resembled a series of rebounds, with words,

37 Knox, *Works*, ii, 395–7.

38 Knox, *Works*, ii, 398–411.

39 Jane E. A. Dawson, "'There is nothing like a good gossip': baptism, kinship and alliance in early modern Scotland", in Christian J. Kay and Margaret A. Mackay (eds), *Perspectives on the Older Scottish Tongue: A Celebration of DOST* (Edinburgh, 2005), 38–47.

phrases and ritual ricocheting back and forth producing an intermingling. Where there was a core of shared concepts, such as the importance of faithfulness, the undertaking of obligations, the creation of amity and a common purpose, this was relatively straightforward. However, sharing languages could create problems where the two sets of values were at odds. In the long run, the religious bond and the noble bond produced radically different answers to the questions, 'who is my ally?' and 'where does my allegiance lie?'

As the 1562 bond indicated, the establishment of the Reformed Kirk as a national institution added another strand to the tangle of competing allegiances. It brought the language of bonding closer to a confession of faith and the rituals of repentance being used within the kirk's disciplinary system. A common sight and sound for early modern Scots was of penitents performing and expressing their repentance in the parish church as a result of the routine discipline of the kirk sessions.⁴⁰ Of greater significance for general bonding was the public repentance ritual of the General Fast, with its emphasis upon the covenant between God and his people and the obligations this entailed.⁴¹ Most of the instances when a general bond was circulated, including the National Covenant, were accompanied by a Fast; its language formed a backdrop to bonding. The General Fast drew upon the two different views of the 'godly', and the 'Kirk', using both the concept of a Protestant nation with a fully Reformed Kirk and the 'remnant' of the faithful who besought God on behalf of the sinful realm. These ideas and the tensions they created fed into the covenant mix of the seventeenth century.

VI

In 1581 many of these strands were brought together when the King's or Negative Confession was turned into a national religious bond. The 'Second Confession of Faith', as Calderwood labelled it, self-consciously looked back to the 1560 Scots Confession.⁴² It celebrated the patriotic belief that:

the true Christiane fayth and religion pleasing God... is receaved, beleved and defended by manie and sindrie notable kyrkis and realmes, but cheifly by the kyrk of Scotland ... as more peticulerly is expressed in the confession of our

⁴⁰ Margo Todd, *The Culture of Protestantism in Early Modern Scotland* (New Haven, CT, 2002), ch. 3; Jane E. A. Dawson, 'Discipline and the making of Protestant Scotland', in Duncan B. Forrester and Doug Gay (eds), *Worship and Liturgy in Context: Studies and Case Studies in Theology and Practice* (London, 2009), 123–36.

⁴¹ The Order of the General Fast, Knox, *Works*, vi, 391–422. There is a fuller discussion of the Fast in W. Ian P. Hazlett, 'Playing God's card: Knox and fasting, 1565–66', in Roger A. Mason (ed.), *John Knox and the British Reformations* (Aldershot, 1998), 176–98.

⁴² Calderwood, *History*, iii, 502–5; William C. Dickinson and Gordon Donaldson (eds), *A Source Book of Scottish History*, vol. iii: 1567–1707 (2nd edn, Edinburgh, 1961), 32–5.

fayth stablished and publictly confirmed by sindrie actis of parlamentis, and now of a long tyme had bene openly professed by the kingis Majestie and whole body of this realme both in brught and land.

It was followed by a long and specific list of 'all kynd of papistrie' that 'we detest' – a list that earned the confession its 'negative' nickname with contemporary Roman Catholics.⁴³ Eventually the signatories asserted that 'we joyne our selves willingly in doctrine, fayth, religion, discipline, and use of the holie sacramentis, as lyvlie memberis of the same in Christ our head'. Then came the promise, 'swearing by the great name of the Lord our God that we shall continue in the obedience of the doctrine and discipline of this kyrk and shal defend the same according to our vocation and power all the dayes of our lyves'. Although it had first been signed by the king, his household and court, it was extended by royal command on 2 March to the whole of the realm. In a significant combination of the techniques of general bonding with an obligatory Confession, it was to be enforced by both royal and ecclesiastical authority, accompanied by civil and religious sanctions. The document was to be signed or accepted 'under the panes conteyned in the law, and danger both of body and saule in the day of Godis fearfull judgement'.

The Confession faced a novel problem over its 'enemies'. While the Pope and Roman Catholic rulers abroad were easily identifiable, those at home remained hidden. The fear was that these dangerous hypocrites conformed outwardly to the Reformed Kirk, but were waiting 'when tyme may serve, to become open ennemeis and persecutoris'. Adopting the language of penitence, the signatories declared that we:

protest and call the searcher of all heartis for witnes, that our myndis and heartis do fullylly agree with this our confession, promise, othe, and subscription ... [and] are perswaded onely in our conscience throught the knowledge and love of Godis true religion prented in oure heartis by the holie sprit, as we shall answer to him in the day when the secretis of all heartis shalbe disclosed.

There was a reversion to the language of bonding and a strong echo of the king's coronation oath in 1567, when the second promise was made in the Confession.

The 1567 General Assembly had made a strong association between the coronation oath and a religious bond. It had summarised its understanding of the royal oath to be made by kings at:

ther first entres, befor they be crownit and inaugurat, sall make ther faithfull league and promise to the true kirk of God, that they sall maintaine and defend, and be all lawfull meanes sett forward, the true religioun of Jesus Chryst presentlie confessit and establishit within this realme ... as they crave

43 *DOST*, s.v. 'negative'.

obedience of there subiects, so the band and contract to be mutuall and reciproque in all tymes comeing betuixt the prince and God, and also betuixt the prince and faithfull peiple according to the word of God.

As a way of associating the kingdom with the king's coronation bond, a General Fast had been held and a general bond to root out idolatry and establish true religion was circulated by the Assembly.⁴⁴

Within the King's Confession of 1581, allegiance to God and true religion were carefully aligned in the second promise with the allegiance owed to the monarch.

We shall defend his [the king's] persone and authoritie with our geyr, bodyes, and lyves in the defence of Christis evangell, libertie of our countrey, ministration of justice and punishment of iniquitie, agaynst all enemies within this realme or without.

In its final passage, the document reverted to the language of salvation and divine judgement, paralleling the defence of the king with that given by God to each Christian:

as we desyre our God to be a strong and mercyfull defender of us in the day of our death and cuming of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whome with the Father and the Holie Sprit be all honour and glorie eternally.

This confession was an official document circulated and enforced by the authority of the crown and the Kirk. The masterstroke of placing the promise to defend true religion and the Kirk alongside the promise to uphold the king's person and authority appeared to have tamed the rebellious element within religious bonding.

VII

Having remained dormant for most of the century following the Reformation, the full rebellious potential of religious bonding erupted spectacularly in 1638 when the National Covenant was signed in Greyfriars churchyard, Edinburgh.⁴⁵ Ironically, it was the crucial double promise from the King's Confession of allegiance to the king and to true religion that made the

44 *BUK*, i, 108–10; Calderwood, *History*, ii, 324. For a full discussion of the 1567 coronation and its combination of traditional elements with revolutionary ones, see Michael Lynch, 'Scotland's first Protestant coronation: revolutionaries, sovereignty and the culture of nostalgia', in L. A. J. R. Houwen (ed.), *Literature and Religion in Late Medieval and Early Modern Scotland: Essays in Honour of Alasdair A. MacDonald* (Leuven, 2012), 177–207.

45 For the text of the National Covenant, as quoted below, see Dickinson and Donaldson (eds), *Source Book*, iii, 95–104. It was also incorporated into an act of parliament in 1640: RPS, 1640/6/36.

National Covenant possible. The entire Confession was incorporated word for word at the start of the Covenant, and it was emphasised that the Confession had been signed by 'all ranks' and 'all sorts of persons'. In the style of general bonds, after the first signing in Edinburgh, the Covenant was circulated throughout the kingdom to gather as many signatures as possible. In a phrase that deliberately recalled the tradition of general religious bonding and the Confessions, the Covenant described itself as 'a general band for the maintenance of the true religion and the king's person', and mentioned 'the laudable example of our Worthy and Religious Progenitors'. Following a long recital of parliamentary acts carefully selected to justify the protests about religious innovations, specific reference was also made to the king's coronation oath. This was both the general fact 'that all Kings and Princes at their Coronation and reception of their Princely Authority shall make their faithfull promise by their solemn oath in the presence of the Eternal God ... to maintain the true Religion of Christ Jesus', and the specific reference to Charles I's coronation oath made in 1633. For good measure, the earlier Scots Confession and the practice of catechising were reintroduced within the text to reinforce confessional and ecclesiastical continuity.

Near the beginning of the Covenant there was a bold profession:

[we] do hereby professe, and before God, his Angels, and the World solemnly declare, That, with our whole hearts we agree & resolve, all the dayes of our life, constantly to adhere unto, and to defend the foresaid true Religion.

However, the full promise was included much later:

We promise, and swear by the Great Name of the Lord our God, to continue in the Profession and Obedience of the Foresaid Religion: That we shall defend the same ... according to our vocation, and to the uttermost of that power that God hath put in our hands, all the dayes of our life.

As in the King's Confession, a second promise was added: 'we promise and swear, that we shall, to the uttermost of our power, with our meanes and lives, stand to the defence of our dread Sovereigne.' The language concerning the defence of the king's person had the impeccable pedigree of the King's Confession, but also could be understood to convey, in a suitably non-specific phrase, the traditional medieval demand to separate the king from his evil counsellors. This was what the Covenanters wanted to happen in order to effect the change of royal policy that they desired.

The language of bonding came to the fore when reference was made to the creation of the alliance of the signatories, especially in the 'all for one and one for all' clause:

whatsoever shall be done to the least of us for that cause, shal be taken as done to us all in general, and to every one of us in particular. And that we shall neither directly nor indirectly suffer ourselves to be divided ... from this blessed & loyall Conjunction.

At the end was appended the devotional language of personal promise or covenant concerning a moral 'life & conversation, as beseemeth Christians, who have renewed their Covenant with God', when those signing promised 'to be good examples to others of all Godlinesse, Sobernesse and Righteousnesse'.

VIII

The National Covenant contained a wide range of ideas culled from many different sources; these disparate parts did not fit together into a single, coherent whole. Whilst it did contain many of the phrases and concepts developed in the religious bonds of the Reformation period concerning the protection and defence of preaching, of the ministers and of the congregation, it was not really cast in their mould. The King's Confession of 1581 had acted as a filter as well as a transmitter for that tradition of bonding. From the 1590s, with the introduction of federal theology into Scotland, there had been a major expansion of discussion about covenants that had dropped many new ideas and expressions into the pot in which the Covenant was brewed.⁴⁶ The excessively prolix National Covenant borrowed forms and devices from many different sources, with the language of bonds making only a minor contribution. By 1638 the practice of bonding was dying out; rather than forming part of everyday life, its language and forms were fading to a memory. The short and coherent format of the bonds of maintenance had been carried into religious bonding during the Reformation period. Once bonds ceased to be familiar, they no longer served as models for the expression of allegiance.

Running to c.4,300 words, the National Covenant was not an easy text to grasp at first or even subsequent hearings or readings. Thanks to the pre-existing tradition of religious bonding, its adoption could be transformed into a symbolic and emotive ritual.⁴⁷ In his diary, Archibald Johnston of Wariston, one of the Covenant's authors, recorded the reception of the Covenant at Currie parish church on 18 March 1638. During this national fast day the minister read the Covenant aloud, as he had the previous Sunday, and then explained parts of the text by reference to the Old Testament covenants. All was quiet and orderly until the time came for making the promise. The emotion overflowed at the point when the congregation stood and raised their arms to swear in the presence of God:

Bot immediatly thairafter at his lifting up of his hand and his desyring the congregation to stand up and lift up thair hand and suare unto the aeternal God, and at thair standing up and lifting up thair hands, in the twinkling of

⁴⁶ David G. Mullan, *Scottish Puritanism, 1590–1638* (Oxford, 2000), ch. 6.

⁴⁷ Margaret Steele, 'The "politick Christian": the theological background to the National Covenant', in Morrill (ed.), *Scottish National Covenant*, 31–67, at p. 37.

ane eye thair fell sutch ane extraordinarie influence of God's Sprit upon the whol congregation, melting thair frozen hearts, waltering thair dry cheeks, chainging thair verry countenances, as it was a wonder to seie so visible, sensible, momentaneal a chainge upon al, man and woman, lasse and ladde, pastor and people.⁴⁸

This description furnishes a salutary reminder to historians that the document is not everything, though it remains important. The performance and the action often conveyed more to early modern Scots than the words and the legal document they accompanied. As Jenny has demonstrated in her discussions of the world of lordship, the visual language of ritual and gesture was as powerful as the written language of the bonds.⁴⁹ This is yet another of those trails inviting exploration that Jenny has blazed for us.



48 *Diary of Archibald Johnston of Wariston, 1632–1639*, ed. George M. Paul (SHS, 1911), 327–8.

49 Jenny Wormald, 'Bloodfeud, kindred and government in early modern Scotland', *Past and Present* 87 (May 1980), 54–97; Wormald, *Lords and Men*.